

ctkAlive! Scripture Study
Palm Sunday
2023—A Cycle



What do I see?

As I study this image, what does it say to me about the kingship of Christ and my own place in that kingdom?

Image Source: [National Catholic Register](#)

Opening Prayer

(edited, abridged, and adapted for use here)

Palm Sunday Prayer

God of light and vision,
celebrating your Son's entry
into Jerusalem for the last time,
I now approach another Holy Week.
Open my mind to the word of Scripture.
Let your wisdom enlighten me.
Help me to be aware during the coming week
of all that your love has done for me—
and for everyone who ever walked this earth.
I ask this in the name of Jesus, my Risen Lord.
Amen.

Adapted from an unnamed original source

Scripture Readings

Isaiah 50: 4-7 "The Lord has given me a well-trained tongue.'

Psalms 22 (8-9, 17-20, 23-24) "My enemies gloat over me in triumph. They divide up my clothes among themselves; they roll dice for my garments.

Philippians 2: 6-11 "Christ Jesus... did not regard equality with God something to be grasped, rather he emptied himself...."

Gospel at the entrance procession—Matthew 21: 1-11 "*Hosanna!* Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

[Matthew's Passion of Christ ... 26: 14 to 27: 66 "Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, 'What will you give me if I hand (Jesus) over to you?']"

Introduction to Palm Sunday

In college and professional sports, the worst thing that can happen to a coach is to get a "vote of confidence" from the athletic director or the owner of the team—a sure sign the coach is about to be fired.

Palm (Passion) Sunday reminds us of the small crowd who welcomed Jesus into the holy city of Jerusalem (their "vote of confidence"). In less than a week, those cheers turned to jeers, "Crucify him!" What happened to Jesus warns us to keep clear our motivation for engaging in Christian life and ministry. If we expect to gain attention and approval, we might be in for a fall. Jesus accepted the acclaim of the crowds, but it didn't turn him away from the final confrontation that ended in his death.

Bishop Ken Untener, wrote in his *Little Black Book 2007*: "When I hold my palm branches, I say that I am willing to follow the king. I'm willing to be loving, forgiving... to respond to evil with goodness. I'm willing to take the cross as my logo.... We don't casually pick up these palms. We don't lightly place them in our homes. We do so knowing what we are committing ourselves to."

A Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah (50: 4-7)

The sovereign Lord has given me
the capacity to be his spokesman,
so that I know how to help the weary.
He wakes me up every morning;
he makes me alert so I can listen attentively as disciples do.
The sovereign Lord has spoken to me clearly;
I have not rebelled, I have not turned back.
I offered my back to those who attacked,
my jaws to those who tore out my beard;
I did not hide my face from insults and spitting.
But the sovereign Lord helps me,
so I am not humiliated.
For that reason I am steadfastly resolved;
I know I will not be put to shame.

Personal Reflection

Prophets who preceded Isaiah met with the same opposition from their fellow Jews. Moses endured a rebellious people. Jeremiah suffered persecution and imprisonment. On the basis of these examples, we see a profile and mission of the perfect servant of Yahweh, Jesus.

In the Acts of the Apostles 8: 34, a curious foreigner asked Christian Deacon Philip to help him understand what he—and we just now—read in the above passage: "I offered my back to those who attacked, my jaws to those who tore out my beard; I did not hide my face from insults and spitting."

Puzzled by this text, he asked Philip, “Who is the prophet talking about, himself or another?”

Philip took time to pause in his own journey to help the man understand what Isaiah referred to. He pointed out the prophet’s willingness to suffer for his faith at the hands of his fellow Jews. Philip spoke of Isaiah as a precursor of the crucified and now risen Christ.

Isaiah’s gift and ministry were to encourage the discouraged (“[I] speak to the weary a word that will rouse them”).

— *Who plays the “Isaiah” role in my life... the one who lifts me up, when I am down?*

— *In what ways do I perform that “lifting up” ministry for others? In other words, who among my family and friends might say of me, “(_my name_) always makes me feel better about myself, more hopeful about my future?”*

Responsorial: Psalm 22 (8-9, 17-20, 23-24)

The suffering servant wins the deliverance of the nation. A psalm of David.

My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?

My enemies say,
“Commit yourself to the Lord!
Let the Lord rescue him!
Let the Lord deliver him, for he delights in him.”
My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?

I can count all my bones;
my enemies gloat over me in triumph.
They divide up my clothes among themselves;
they roll dice for my garments.
But you, O Lord, do not remain far away!
You are my source of strength! Hurry and help me!
Deliver me from the sword!
My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?

You loyal followers of the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
All you descendants of Israel, stand in awe of him!
For he did not despise or detest the suffering of the oppressed;
he did not ignore him.
When he cried out to him, he responded.
My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?

Personal Reflection

When a dying person has the strength to whisper, “Our Father...,” we may suppose that his thoughts go on with the prayer his lips cannot finish. When the crucified Christ shouted the first dreadful line of this psalm, his mind must have gone on to its triumphal end, thanking his Father that what felt like dark desertion would lead to the light beyond it.

But Christ did not suffer alone. We declare ourselves “in Christ,” for better or for worse, in suffering and in joy. The feeling of desertion and the uncertainty that comes with physical pain and continued weakness, must be lived through faith. That faith may offer little light in the moment... but strength to go on doing what we know we must. When we suffer physical, emotional, and/or mental “torture,” we must remember that Christ also suffered in a similar manner. And because his suffering and death brought resurrection and hope to the world, we too hope for our salvation.

“My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?”

— *When did I ever feel abandoned by God? What was going on in my life at the time? How did I come to realize that God had not abandoned me?*

— *At this very moment, what trace or remnant of abandonment do I experience? How am I dealing with it? Where do I go for encouragement and support?*

A Reading from the Letter of St. Paul to the Philippians (2: 5-11)

You should have the same attitude toward one another
that Christ Jesus had,
who though he existed in the form of God
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
but emptied himself
by taking on the form of a slave,
by looking like other men,
and by sharing in human nature.

He humbled himself,
by becoming obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross!
As a result God exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee will bow—
in heaven and on earth
and under the earth—
and every tongue confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.

Personal Reflection

In this hymn, which serves also as a creed, Paul plots the journey of Christ—from God to man, from rich to poor, from first to last, from master to servant. The Lord Jesus identified himself with the most humble, the most afflicted and most despised people on earth. Paul challenges Jesus' Christian followers to identify with the most humble people on earth and to share with them a truly evangelical life. Sadly, but often for good reason, we spend most of our time and energy on our own personal or family needs and fulfillment. Yet Jesus took the opposite way putting others' needs ahead of his own. All he asks of us is that we find a balance between our needs and those of the poor and needy. Participating *solely* in Sunday Mass or worship services doesn't achieve that balance. There's more.... There's more we need to do for him than that.

Paul reminds us that our God is a continuously *self-emptying* God.

— *What does the call to 'self-emptying' mean in my personal life circumstances?*

In other words, how is Jesus asking me to "empty" and "humble" myself for others (as parent, spouse, lover, employee, friend, vowed religious, lay minister, et al.)?

The Gospel According to Matthew (21: 1-11)

"When [Jesus and his disciples] approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, telling them, 'Go to the village ahead of you. Right away you will find a donkey tied there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you are to say, "The Lord needs them," and he will send them at once.

"This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet:

*Tell the people of Zion,
'Look, your king is coming to you,
unassuming and seated on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*

"So the disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. A large crowd spread their cloaks on the road. Others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

"The crowds that went ahead of him and those following kept shouting, '*Hosanna* to the Son of David! *Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna* in the highest!'

"As Jesus entered Jerusalem the whole city was thrown into an uproar, saying, 'Who is this?'

"And the crowds were saying, 'This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

Personal Reflection

In a point of *minor* interest, Matthew tells us that Jesus procured *two* donkeys, one grown, the other a foal. Yet, most Christian recollection and art features only one animal.

After waving our palm branches during this weekend's liturgy, let's prepare for Holy

Week with the same clarity of vision and purpose that Jesus had. Our efforts to do good in our corner of the world do make a difference, whether we are hailed for them... or crucified for them. Jesus calls us to believe that our ministerial efforts do make a difference in the world, even when they seem small and overshadowed by our failings.

Matthew's "Hosanna" and "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" are proclaimed at every Catholic Mass at the *Sanctus* ("Holy, holy") at the beginning of the Eucharistic Prayer.

— *Why do my "Hosannas" fail to excite me, since it's the same person—the Risen Christ—who is present to us in the Gospels, in the Eucharist, and at the core of our community life and worship?*

— *If I want the week ahead to be a real "holy" week—a time of deep spiritual preparation for Easter—how will I need to adjust my normal routine and/or mental attitude to make it so?*

— *What would I say, if someone were to ask me, as the bystanders asked about Jesus, "Who is this man"?*

For Inspirational Listening and Watching

["Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion \(Cycle A\)"](#) by [John Michael Talbot](#)

["Palm Sunday"](#) by [Bishop Robert Barron](#) (11 min)
(a good historical and scriptural analysis of the of this week's celebration)

Listen

["Jerusalem My Destiny,"](#) composed by [Rory Cooney](#) and sung by [Sunday 7pm Choir](#)

From St. Matthew's Passion ("Have mercy Lord, My God, for the sake of my tears"), a classical music piece composed by [Johann Sebastian Bach](#), featuring [Lana Trotoevsek](#) (violin) and famed cellist [Stjepan Hauser](#) (also known simply as Hauser), and [Zagreb \(Croatia\) Philharmonic Orchestra](#). (8 min)

Journaling Prompts

Based on this weekend's Scripture readings, what does Jesus ask me to do TODAY regarding...

(1) the quality of the love I bring to my personal relationships...
and

(2) my life as an emissary of Christ, committed to bringing God's love to the people with whom I interact in person and on social media?

*Who needs to receive from me this week a moment of laughter and personal concern?
Why do I hesitate?*

In light of this weekend's Scriptures, take some time to write about events occurring in your life this week and what you see happening in the world.

Preview of Next Weekend's Scriptures

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord

Note: Easter readings vary according to the times of day: Saturday vigil, early morning, later in the day/evening. The following are the readings for Easter Sunday early morning.

Acts of the Apostles 10: 34, 37-43 Peter said, "To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name."

Psalms 118: 1-2, 16-17, 22-23 "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good."

Colossians 3: 1-4 "If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above."

John 20: 1-9 "Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark and saw the stone removed from the tomb."

Closing Prayer

Walking With Jesus

Lord Jesus, let me accompany you

on your journey to Bethany.

You came into the world to give me
an example of how to conduct myself
in this world.

In obedience to your Father,
you took upon yourself
a body—like mine—and gave yourself up
to death on a cross.

In your mercy, grant me the grace
to learn from the example
of your passion and death
and share in the glory of your resurrection.

I ask this in your holy name,
you who live and reign
in unity with your Father and Holy Spirit,
one God forever... and ever.

Amen

Adapted from an unnamed original source

Note: *Some internet links endure online, others come and go. If a link fails, the owner of the site may have taken it down.*

Gender usage in these reflections: *We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

The Sunday readings are from the New English Translation (NET)
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